O D E

TO THE

Athenian Society.

The Supplement to the Fifth Volume of the Athenian Gazette; . . . London, Printed for John Dunton at the Raven in the Poultry, . . . [1691–2], p. 1.
A Supplement to the Athenian Oracle: . . . London, Printed for Andrew Bell, . . . 1710. p. 111.
Sphinx: A Poem, Ascrib'd to Certain Anonymous Authors. By the Rev'd. Dean S—T. . . . Dublin: Printed in the Year 1724–5.

The Athenian Oracle: . . . Vol. IV. The Third Edition. . . . London, . . . MDCCXXVIII. p. 111.
Miscellanies. The Tenth Volume. By Dr. Swift. London: Printed for R. Dodsley in Pall-mall. M.DCC.XLV. p. 178 (1750, p. 178).
Miscellanies, 1751, xiii. 175.
The Works of Jonathan Swift, D.D., ed. Hawkesworth, 1755, 4to, iv (1), 229.

With this ode (if we ignore doubtful attributions) Swift saw himself in print for the first time. The poem was 'rough drawn in a week, and finished in two days after' (*Corresp.* i. 363). It was published by John Dunton, in the supplement to the Fifth Volume of the *Athenian Gazette*, early in 1692, prefaced with a letter from Swift, dated from Moor Park. The *Athenian Gazette*, renamed the *Athenian Mercury*, was a periodical published weekly from 17 March, 1689–90, to 8 February, 1695–6, resolving all queries addressed to it by correspondents. In 1710, and again in 1728, the ode was reprinted in a fourth, and supplementary, volume of selections from the *Athenian Gazette*, of which three volumes first appeared in 1703 under the title of *The Athenian Oracle*. The poem also appeared in a curious little eight-leaf Dublin pamphlet, entitled *Sphinx*. It was included with Swift's works in the *Miscellanies* volume of 1745. The prefatory letter was not included in *Sphinx*, or in the successive editions of Swift's works.

Swift's interest in Dunton's venture may have been due to the fact that Sir William Temple was a contributor (Dunton's *Life and Errors*, 1705, p. 261). In the same work (p. 260) Dunton refers to Swift as 'a Country Gentleman' who sent 'an ingenious Poem', which 'was prefixt to the *Fifth Supplement* of the *Athenian Mercury*'. According to Johnson, in his life of Swift, this was the poem which led Dryden to observe, 'Cousin Swift, you will never be a poet', words which were 'the motive of Swift's perpetual malevolence to Dryden'.

The text is here given as it appeared in the supplement to the *Athenian Gazette*.

TO THE
Athenian Society.

Moor-park, Feb. 14. 1691.

GENTLEMEN,

SINCE every Body *pretends to trouble you with their* Follies, *I thought I might claim the Priviledge of an* English-man, *and put in my share among the rest. Being*

last year in Ireland, (*from whence I returned about half a year ago*) *I heard only a* loose talk of your Society, *and believed the design to be only some new* Folly *just suitable to the Age, which God knows, I little expected ever to produce any thing* extraordinary. *Since my being in* England, *having still continued in the Countrey, and much out of Company; I had but little advantage of knowing any more, till about two Months ago* passing through *Oxford*, a very learned Gentleman *there, first shew'd me two or three of your* Volumes, *and gave me his Account and Opinion of you; a while after, I came to this place, upon a Visit to —— where I have been ever since, and have seen all the* four Volumes with their Supplements, *which answering my Expectation. The perusal has produced, what you find inclosed.*

As I have been somewhat inclined to this Folly, *so I have seldom wanted some-body to flatter me in it. And for the* Ode *inclosed, I have sent it to a Person of very great* Learning and Honour, *and since to some others, the best of my Acquaintance,* (to which I thought very proper to inure it for a greater light) *and they have all been pleased to tell me, that they are sure it will not be unwelcome, and that I should* beg the Honour *of You to let it be Printed before Your* next Volume (*which I think, is soon to be published,*) *it being so usual before most Books of any great value among Poets, and before it's seeing the World, I submit it wholly to the* Correction of your Pens.

I intreat therefore one of You would descend *so far, as to write two or three lines to me of your Pleasure upon it. Which as I cannot but expect from Gentlemen, who have so well shewn upon so many occasions, that* greatest Character *of Scholars, in being favourable to the* Ignorant, *So I am sure nothing at present, can more highly oblige me, or make me happier.*

I am,

(Gentlemen)
Your ever most Humble,
and most
admiring Servant.
Jonathan Swift.

I.

AS when the *Deluge* first began to fall,
That *mighty Ebb* never to flow again,
(When this huge Bodies Moisture was so great
It quite o'recame the vital Heat,)
That Mountain which was highest first of all
Appear'd, above the Universal Main,
To bless the *Primitive Sailer*'s weary sight,
And 'twas perhaps *Parnassus*, if in height
It be as great as 'tis in Fame,
And nigh to Heaven as is its Name.
So after th' Inundation of a War
When *Learnings little Houshold* did embark
With her World's fruitful System in her sacred Ark,
At the first Ebb of Noise and Fears,
Philosophy's exalted head appears;
And the *Dove-muse*, will now no longer stay
But plumes her Silver Wings and flies away,
And now a Laurel wreath she brings from far,
To Crown the happy Conquerour,
To shew the Flood begins to cease,
And brings the dear Reward of *Victory and Peace.*

II.

The eager *Muse* took wing upon the Waves decline,
When War her cloudy aspect just withdrew,
When the *Bright Sun* of Peace began to shine,
And for a while in heav'nly Contemplation sate
On the high Top of peaceful *Ararat*;
And pluckt a *Laurel* branch (for Laurel was the first that grew,
The first of Plants after the Thunder, Storm, and Rain)
And thence with joyful, nimble Wing
Flew dutifully back again,
And made an *Humble* Chaplet for the King.*

**The Ode I writ to the King in Ireland.*

31. *Humble Chaplet.* The marginal note is Swift's. See p. 4.

And the *Dove-muse* is fled once more,
(Glad of the Victory, yet frighted at the War)
And now discovers *from afar*
A Peaceful and a Flourishing Shore:
No sooner does she land
On the delightful *Strand*,
When strait she sees the *Countrey all around*,
Where fatal *Neptune* rul'd e'rewhile,
Scatter'd with *flowry Vales*, with fruitful Gardens crown'd,
And many a pleasant Wood,
As if the Universal *Nile*
Had rather water'd it, than drown'd:
It seems some floating piece of *Paradice*,
Preserv'd by wonder from the Flood,
Long *wandring thrô the Deep*, as we are told
Fam'd *Delos* did of old,
And the transported Muse imagin'd it
To be a fitter *Birth-place for the God of Wit;*
Or the much-talkt Oracular Grove
When with amazing Joy she hears,
An *unknown Musick* all around,
Charming her greedy Ears
With many a heavenly Song
Of Nature and of Art, of deep *Philosophy and Love*,
Whilst Angels tune the Voice, and God inspires the Tongue.
In vain she catches at the empty Sound,
In vain pursues the Musick with her longing Eye,
And *Courts* the wanton Echoes as they fly.

III.

Pardon **Ye great Unknown,** and far-exalted Men,
The wild excursions of a youthful pen;

36 does] 1710, 1725, 1728, 1745 did 1750, 1751, 1755 38 When] 1710, 1725, 1728 Then 1745 Than 1750, 1751, 1755 61 excursions of a youthful] Attempts of an unskilful 1725

47. *Fam'd Delos* . . . The floating isle, raised from the sea by Neptune, and later secured to the bottom by Zeus that Latona might there bring forth Apollo and Diana. Ovid, *Metam.*, vi. 191, 333.

Forgive a young and (almost) *Virgin-muse*,
Whom blind and eager Curiosity
(Yet Curiosity they say,
Is in her Sex a Crime needs no excuse)
Has forc't to grope her uncouth way
After a *mighty Light* that leads her wandring Eye;
No wonder then she quits the *narrow Path of Sense*
For a dear Ramble thro' Impertinence,
Impertinence, the *Scurvy* of Mankind,
And all we Fools, who are the greater part of it,
Tho' we be of two different Factions still,
Both the Good-natur'd and the Ill,
Yet wheresoe're you look you'll always find
We join like Flyes, and Wasps, in buzzing about Wit.
In me, who am of the first Sect of these,
All Merit that transcends the humble Rules
Of my own dazled, scanty Sense
Begets a kinder Folly and Impertinence
Of Admiration and of Praise:
And our good Brethren of the *Surly Sect*
Must e'en all herd with us their *Kindred Fools*,
For tho' possess'd of present Vogue they've made
Railing a Rule of Wit, and Obloquy a Trade,
Yet the same want of Brains produces each effect;
And you whom *Pluto*'s Helm does wisely shroud
From us the Blind and thoughtless Croud,
Like the fam'd Hero in his Mother's Cloud,
Who both our Follies and Impertinencies see,
Do laugh perhaps at theirs, and pity mine and me.

IV.

But Censure's to be understood
Th'*Authentick mark* of the Elect,
The publick Stamp Heav'n sets on all that's Great and Good,
Our shallow Search and Judgment to direct.

The War methinks has made
Our Wit and Learning, narrow as our Trade;
Instead of boldly sailing far to buy
A Stock of Wisdom and Philosophy,
We fondly stay at home in fear
Of ev'ry censuring Privateer,
Forcing a wretched Trade by beating down the sale,
And selling *basely* by Retail,
The Wits, I mean the Atheists of the Age,
Who fain would rule the Pulpit, as they do the Stage,
Wondrous *Refiners* of Philosophy,
Of Morals and Divinity,
By the new *Modish System* of reducing all to sense,
Against all Logick and concluding Laws,
Do own th'Effects of Providence,
And yet deny the Cause.

V.

This *hopeful Sect*, now it begins to see
How little, very little do prevail
Their *first and chiefest force*
To censure, to cry down, and rail,
Not knowing What, or Where, or Who, You be,
Will quickly take another course
And by their never-failing ways
Of Solving all Appearances they please,
We soon shall see them to their ancient Methods fall,
And straight deny you to be *Men, or any thing at all;*
I laugh at the grave Answer they will make,
Which they have always ready, general and Cheap;
'Tis but to say, that what we daily meet,
And by a fond mistake

100 *censuring*] pilfering 1725

95–100. *The War . . .* Swift's reference is to the war on the Continent, not that in Ireland. In 1689 William formed an alliance with Austria, Spain, and the Dutch against France. The campaign of 1691 had been indecisive.

Perhaps imagine to be *wondrous Wit*
And think, alas, to be by mortals writ,
Is but a *Crowd of Atoms* justling in a heap,
Which from Eternal Seeds begun,
Justling some thousand years till ripen'd by the Sun,
They're now, just now, as naturally born,
As from the *Womb of Earth* a field of Corn.

VI.

But as for poor contented Me,
Who must my Weakness and my Ignorance confess,
That I believe in much, I ne're can hope to see;
Methinks I'm satisfied to guess
That this New, Noble, and Delightful Scene
Is wonderfully mov'd by some exalted Men,
Who have well studied in the *Worlds Disease*,
(That Epidemick Error and Depravity
Or in our Judgment or our Eye)
That what *surprises us* can only please:
We often search contentedly the whole World round,
To make some *great Discovery*,
And scorn it when 'tis found.
Just so the Mighty *Nile* has suffer'd in it's Fame,
Because 'tis said, (and perhaps only said)
We've found a little inconsiderable Head
That feeds the huge unequal stream.
Consider *Humane Folly*, and you'll quickly own,
That all the Praises it can give,
By which some fondly boast they shall for ever live,
Won't pay th'*Impertinence* of being known;
Else why should the fam'd *Lydian* King,
Whom all the *Charms* of an Usurped Wife and State,

153. *Lydian King.* Plato, *Rep.* II, 359 C; Cicero, *De Off.*, iii. 9.

With all that Power unfelt, courts Mankind to be Great,
Did with new, unexperienc't Glories wait,
Still wear, still doat on his *Invisible Ring*.

VII.

Were I to form a regular *Thought of Fame*,
Which is perhaps as hard t'imagine right
As to paint Eccho to the Sight:
I would not draw th'*Idea* from an empty Name;
Because, alas, when we all dye
Careless and Ignorant Posterity,
Although they praise the Learning and the Wit,
And tho' the Title seems to show
The Name and Man, by whom the Book was writ,
Yet how shall they be brought to know
Whether that very Name was *He, or You, or I?*
Less should I dawb it o're with transitory Praise,
And *water-colours* of these Days,
These Days! where ev'n th'Extravagance of Poetry
Is at a loss for Figures to express
Men's Folly, Whimsyes, and Inconstancy,
And by a faint Description make them less.
Then tell us what is Fame? where shall we search for it?
Look where exalted Vertue and Religion sit
Enthron'd with Heav'nly Wit,
Look where you see
The greatest scorn of *Learned Vanity*,
(And then how much a nothing is Mankind!
Whose Reason is weigh'd down by Popular air,
Who by that, vainly talks of bafling Death,
And hopes to lengthen Life by a *Transfusion of Breath*,
Which yet whoe're examines right will find
To be an Art as vain, as *Bottling up of Wind:*)
And when you find out these, believe true Fame is there.
Far above all Reward, yet to which all is due,
And this **Ye great Unknown,** is only known in You.

157 *Ring.*] Ring? 1710, 1725, 1728, 1745, 1750, 1751 ring? 1755
make] 1751 makes 1710, 1725, 1728, 1745, 1750, 1755

VIII.

The *Jugling Sea-god* when by chance trepann'd
By some instructed *Querist* sleeping on the Sand,
Impatient of all *Answers*, straight became
A *Stealing Brook*, and strove to creep away
Into his Native Sea,
Vext at their Follies, murmur'd in his Stream;
But disappointed of his fond Desire
Would vanish in a *Pyramid of Fire.*
This Surly, *Slipp'ry God*, when He design'd
To furnish his Escapes,
Ne'er borrow'd more *variety of Shapes*
Than *You* to please and satisfie Mankind,
And seem (almost) transform'd to *Water*, *Flame*, *and Air*,
So well You answer all Phænomenaes there;
Tho' Madmen and the Wits, Philosophers and Fools,
With all that Factious or Enthusiastick Dotards dream,
And all the incohærent Jargon of the Schools,
Tho' all the Fumes of Fear, Hope, Love, and Shame,
Contrive to shock your Minds, *with many a sensless doubt*,
Doubts, where the *Delphick God* would grope in Ignorance and Night,
The God of Learning and of Light
Would want a * *God Himself to help him out.*

*θεὸς ἀπὸ μηχανῆς.

IX.

Philosophy, as it before us lyes,
Seems to have borrow'd some ungrateful tast
Of *Doubts*, Impertinence, and Niceties,
From ev'ry Age through which it pass't,
But always with a stronger relish of the Last.
This beauteous Queen by Heaven design'd
To be the great Original
For Man to *dress and polish* his Uncourtly Mind,
In what *Mock-habits* have they put her, since the Fall!

189 *Jugling Sea-god.* Proteus, Ovid, *Metam.*, viii. 731 ff.

More oft in Fools and Mad-mens hands than Sages
She seems a Medly of all Ages,
With a huge Fardingal to swell her Fustian Stuff,
A new Commode, a *Top-knot*, and a Ruff,
Her Face patch't o'er with *Modern Pedantry*,
With a long sweeping Train
Of Comments and Disputes, ridiculous and vain,
All of old Cut with a new Dye,
How soon have You restor'd her Charms!
And rid her of her *Lumber and Her Books*,
Drest her again Genteel and Neat,
And rather Tite than Great,
How fond we are to court Her to our Arms!
How much of Heav'n is in her naked looks.

X.

Thus the *deluding Muse* oft blinds me to her Ways,
And ev'n my very Thoughts transfers
And changes all to Beauty, and the Praise
Of that proud Tyrant Sex of Hers.
The *Rebel Muse*, alas, takes part
But with my own Rebellious Heart,
And You with *fatal and Immortal Wit* conspire
To fann th'unhappy Fire:
Cruel Unknown! what is it You intend!
Ah, could You! could you hope *a Poet for your Friend!*
Rather forgive what my first Transport said,
May all the Blood, which shall by *Womans scorn* be shed
Lye on you, and on your Childrens Head,
For You (ah, did I think I e'er should live to see
The fatal Time when that cou'd be)
Have ev'n encreas't their *Pride and Cruelty.*

233 *looks.*] Looks! 1710, 1725, 1728, 1750, 1751 looks! 1745, 1755 242 intend!] intend? *remainder* 246 Lye on] Lie upon *remainder*

222–3. *Fardingal . . . Commode, . . . Top-knot.* A farthingale was a hooped petticoat; a commode, a tall head-dress, fashionable at the time with women, consisting of a wire frame-work covered with lace or silk; a top-knot, a bow of ribbon worn on the top of the head by women.

Woman seems now above all Vanity grown,
Still boasting of Her Great Unknown;
Platonick Champions, gain'd without one Female Wile,
Or the vast **Charges of a Smile**;
Which 'tis a shame to see how much of late
You've taught the *Cov'tous* Wretches to o're-rate,
And which they've now the Conscience to way
In the same Ballance with our Tears,
And with such *Scanty* Wages pay
The Bondage and the Slavery of Years.
Let the *vain sex* dream on, their Empire comes from Us,
And had they *common* Generosity
They would not use Us thus.
Well—tho' you've rais'd Her to this high Degree,
Our selves are rais'd as well as she,
And 'spight of all that They or You can do,
'Tis Pride and Happiness enough to Me
Still to be of the same exalted Sex with You.

XI.

Alas, how fleeting, and how vain,
Is even the *nobler Man*, our Learning and our Wit,
I sigh when e're I think of it
As at the closing an unhappy Scene
Of some *great King* and Conqu'rors Death,
When the sad, melancholy Muse
Stays but to catch his *utmost breath*,
I grieve, this Noble Work so happily begun,
So quickly, and so wonderfully carried on,
Must fall at last to Interest, Folly, and Abuse.
There is a *Noon-tide* in our Lives
Which still the sooner it arrives,

254 to see] *Om.* 1750, 1751, 1755 259 the Slavery] 1710, 1725, 1728, 1745 Slavery 1750, 1751, 1755 271 closing] 1710, 1725, 1728 1745 closing of 1750, 1751, 1755 273 sad,] said 1728 275 Noble Work so] noble Work so 1710, 1725, 1728, 1745 nobler Work most 1750 noble Work most 1751 nobler work most 1755 277 Must] May *remainder*

Altho' we boast our *Winter-Sun looks bright,*
And foolishly are glad to see it at it's height
Yet so much sooner comes the long and gloomy Night.
No Conquest ever yet begun
And by one mighty Hero carried to it's height
E'er flourish't under a Successor or a Son;
It lost some mighty Pieces thro' all hands it past
And vanisht to an *empty Title in the Last.*
For when the animating Mind is fled,
(Which Nature never can retain,
Nor e'er call back again)
The Body, tho' Gigantick, lyes all *Cold and Dead.*

XII.

And thus undoubtedly 'twill fare,
With what unhappy Men shall dare,
To be Successors to these Great Unknown,
On Learning's high-establish't Throne.
Censure, and Pedantry, and Pride,
Numberless Nations, stretching far and wide,
Shall (I foresee it) soon with *Gothick* Swarms come forth
From Ignorance's Universal North,
And with blind Rage break all this peaceful Government;
Yet shall these *Traces of your Wit* remain
Like a *just Map* to tell the vast Extent
Of Conquest in your short and Happy Reign;
And to all future Mankind shew
How strange a *Paradox* is true,
That Men, who liv'd and dy'd without a Name,
Are the chief Heroes in the sacred List of Fame.

Jonathan Swift.

Jonathan Swift. The signature does not appear in the *Miscellanies* or collected *Works.*